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X.—BOCCACCIO'S DEFENCE OF POETRY; AS CONTAINED IN THE FOURTEENTH BOOK OF THE *DE GENEALOGIA DEORUM*.

The work in which his Defence of Poetry occurs, the *De Genealogia Deorum*, was first suggested to Boccaccio while he was yet a young man, by Hugo, king of Cyprus. Hugo sent to the young poet, asking him to write a work upon the mythology of antiquity, there being no such book then in existence. Boccaccio seems to have been by no means eager for so tremendous a task, but urged on by his royal patron he at last began it, and continued to work on it at intervals, though the king who had originally set him the undertaking did not live to see its completion. Completed, indeed, it never really was, and it was without the author's knowledge and against his wishes that the manuscript passed out of his hands before it had undergone revision. This accounts in part for the desultory character of the work, its diffuseness, its repetitions, its lack of arrangement and subordination; only in part, of course, for something of all this—that, namely, which corresponds with the essentially indiscriminating, non-selective mind of the author himself—could not have been eliminated by any amount of revision.

The work is written in Latin prose, and the main part of it treats of the heathen myths, with special reference to their allegorical significance. In the fourteenth chapter, however, he attempts to defend his work against the accusations which he foresees it must encounter; and, since, as he says, his work is "wholly poetical,"¹ he is naturally involved in a defense of poetry in general.

He opens his defense by describing his accusers—the jurists, the doctors, the theologians—with such satire as his rather

¹ Fol. p. 359. The references throughout are to the edition of 1532, Basileae, Io. Hervagius.

placid nature could command. Having thus oratorically disposed of the least worthy of his opponents, he passes to the more formidable of the accusations themselves. "What is this poetry?" its maligners clamor; "it is simply a nullity, not worth the attention of a rational being; it is a collection of lies; it is either mere foolishness, or it is morally baneful, or it is so obscure that no one can understand it; at best, the poets are simply apes of the philosophers. Hence, all good men will follow Jerome and Boethius in condemning poetry, they will follow Plato in banishing poets from the cities."

Such is the line of objections taken, and these objections Boccaccio considers one by one, using any argument that he thinks may avail, from the puerile quibbling of the schoolmen to the sweeping and revolutionary art-theories of the new Humanism. Indeed, it is this union, or rather intermingling, of the old and the new, that gives to the treatise much of its peculiar interest and significance.

Poetry, says Boccaccio, is not a nullity. If it were, he naïvely asks, whence come all these volumes of poems?¹ In reality, it is one of the faculties (in the scholastic sense of the word) coming from God, and this very name "*facultas*"—here speaks the schoolman—"implies a certain abundance or fullness." Then follows his own definition of poetry:

"Poetry is a certain fervor of exquisite invention, and of exquisite speaking or writing what one has invented. A power which, proceeding out of the bosom of God, is granted at birth, though, I think, to but few. . . . This noble fervor manifests itself, for example, in urging the mind to a longing for expression, in searching out rare and strange inventions, in giving to one's thoughts order and arrangement, in adorning the composition by means of an unusual interweaving of words and thoughts, in concealing the truth under the beauteous veil of the fable."²

¹ P. 360.

² Cap. VII, fol. pp. 360, 361.

There follows a remarkable exposition of the etymology of the word "poetry."¹ Some malignant persons, he says, have derived it from the Greek *ποιέω*, which they make equivalent to the Latin *finco*, and then, choosing out the worst meaning of this verb *finco*, *i. e.*, to cheat or deceive by made-up stories, they apply this meaning to poetry, and use it as a reproach, calling the poets cheats and deceivers. In reality, Boccaccio assures us, the word comes from an old Greek word, *poëtes*, meaning "carefully chosen expression" ("exquisita locutio") and it was applied to the efforts of the early poets, because they tried to give to their songs a distinctive form and order, by means of rhythm and choice of words.

Thus we see that Boccaccio's theory of poetry emphasizes, on the one hand, the careful ordering and disposition of words; and on the other, the existence of a hidden meaning, an allegorical significance. We are familiar with such a conception, as found, both implicit and explicit, in Dante; it was the conception Petrarch adopted and expounded, and Boccaccio merely gives to it a more elaborate expression.² Note, however, that though he emphasizes the formal side of poetry, the essential thing is in his eyes the content, the allegory; and therefore he can speak of his own ponderous prose treatise on the heathen mythology as being "wholly poetical."

It is possible to read into this notion of poetic allegory a meaning which shall conform to our own art-theories, and such an interpretation has by at least one student of Boccaccio been rather taken for granted.³ But Boccaccio himself had certainly no such meaning in mind, and the sense in which he applied the word "symbolic" to the eclogues of Petrarch and of Virgil is not the sense in which we apply it to Shakespeare's *Lear* or Sophocles' *Œdipus*.

¹ P. 361.

² Cf. *Inferno*, ix; *Convito*, II, 1; *Lett. Can Grande della Scala*; Petrarch, *Epist. Ker. Fam.*, x.

³ Burckhardt, *Renaissance in Italy*, Part III, Chap. iv.

In connection with his art-theory, two other passages may be mentioned here, which occur farther on in the book. In one he speaks of the poet as imitating nature, and this expression suggests a possible trace of Greek influence. But, in his poetic system, the word imitation must apply merely to the external part of the poem, not to its real content. Thus he might say that Virgil describes bees, and in so far imitates nature; but he would also say that, for the discerning reader, Virgil is not really talking about bees at all, but about the human soul or the divine essence, or some other metaphysical topic. This "imitation of nature" as Boccaccio meant it, is then only a part of the external trappings of poetry; it is quite distinct from "imitation" as Aristotle meant it, or as Sidney meant it, or as we may mean it.

Again he says, speaking of Plautus and Terence: "Although they intended nothing beyond what the letter implies, yet by their genius they describe the manners and words of various men . . . and if these things have not actually taken place, yet since they are universal[ly valid] they could have taken place."¹

These last phrases are extremely interesting as the only ones giving any hint of the Aristotelian conception of poetic universality—the conception which was two hundred years afterward beautifully restated by Sidney. But it is no more than a hint. Boccaccio seems to have no idea of its value, and one wonders where he got the notion from at all. He was not the man to have arrived at it by himself, and it sounds like an echo, for it is not the sort of idea one can get hold of independently and let go again.

After defining poetry, Boccaccio proceeds to discuss its origin. Assuming that its first appearance was in the religious formularies of the ancients which accompanied their sacrificial rites, he adduces three theories, which ascribe its origin respectively to the Babylonian fire-worshippers, to the

¹ P. 364. The Latin is: "Cum Communia sint."

Greeks, and to the Jews. The first theory he rejects unconditionally, saying, "yet, without more weighty evidence, I shall not easily believe that an art so sublime had its origin among nations so barbarous and savage."¹ But between the Greeks and the Hebrews he hesitates, and at last shrewdly refers the decision to King Hugo himself, suggesting, however, a compromise solution which would make Musaeus and Moses one and the same person. Whether the resultant from this fusion of the two is to be Hebrew or Greek, he does not say.

The manner of its origin among the Greeks he describes in part as follows (the passage is, by the way, closely paralleled in one of Petrarch's letters):²

"At length, since it seemed absurd for the priests to offer the sacrifice to the deity in silence, they desired to have forms of words drawn up, in which the glory and might of the divinity should be set forth, the desire of the people be expressed, and their prayers be offered to God according to their human necessities. And since it seemed unfitting to address the deity in the same way that one would speak to a rustic or a servant or a familiar friend, they laid upon the priests the charge of devising a more excellent and refined manner of speech. Some of these men—few, indeed, amongst whom are to be counted Musaeus and Linus and Orpheus—filled with a kind of inspiration from the divine mind, composed strange songs, regulated by measure and time, and gave praise to God. In these songs, that they might have greater weight, they concealed the divine mysteries beneath a noble disguise, wishing that the venerable majesty of such [mysteries] should not, through too facile comprehension by the vulgar, fall into contempt. The art-product, because it seemed wonderful and even unheard of, was, as we have said, called from its properties [ab effectu] poetry, or *poëtes*, and those who composed were called poets."³

Boccaccio next considers the assertion that the fables of poets are to be condemned. "I grant," he says, "that poets

¹ P. 362.² *Epist. Rer. Fam.*, x.³ Cap. VIII, p. 362.

are story-tellers, that is, they invent fables, but this seems to me no more disgraceful than it is for a philosopher to have framed a syllogism."¹ To begin with, he goes on in effect, the word *fabula* comes from the verb *for, faris*, and from the same stem is derived the word *confabulatio*, meaning conversation. Now, in the Gospel of Luke, is it not written that the disciples went toward Emmaus, and Christ came to them as they talked together—"Cum confabularentur." Now, he concludes triumphantly, since *confabulari* is thus used with reference to the disciples themselves, it cannot be wrong, and if *confabulari* is not wrong, neither is *fabulari*.²

After this rather astonishing pun, offered, however, in perfect seriousness, he returns to the argument. There are, he says, three kinds of fables to be considered :³

I. Those in which disguise entirely lacks truth, as in the fables of Æsop, where the animals are made to talk, quite contrary to fact. Aristotle too used this kind of fable.

II. Fables where the true and the false are intermingled. This sort is sometimes abused by the comic poets.

III. Fables which approximate history, and are thus close to the truth, though divergent. Of this sort is epic poetry, and the comedies of Plautus and Terence.

IV. The foolish inventions of old women, not worth considering.

For each of the first three Boccaccio now presses his strongest argument—the argument from Scripture writing. The first sort of fables—like Æsop's—will, he says, be found in the Old Testament, as for instance in Judges, ix, 4–15, where the trees of the forest set out to choose for themselves a King. The second makes up the great bulk of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Isaiah, though these visions of theirs are called by the theologians "figures," not fables. The third sort have no less a warrant than the parables of Christ himself. These three, then, cannot be condemned without condemning the Scriptures also.

¹ P. 363.² P. 364.³ Pp. 364, 365.

Passing on to the assertion that poets conceal no meaning beneath their fables, he declares this simply fatuous. It is well known how deep a meaning Virgil's *Bucolics* and *Georgics* contain, and, to come down to modern times, every one must see that Dante was not merely a poet, but a profound philosopher and theologian. Or do they think that "when the poet depicted the double-membered Gryphon dragging the car on the summit of Mount Severus, accompanied by the seven candlesticks and the seven nymphs, with the rest of the triumphal pomp"—do they think that Dante did this merely "to show that he knew how to compose rimes and fables?"¹

Or "who will be so insane as to suppose that that most illustrious and most Christian man, Francisco Petrarca . . . spent so many vigils, so many sacred meditations, so many hours, days, and years . . . simply in depicting Gallus demanding his pipe of the Tyrrhene, or Pamphilus and Mitio contending with one another?" No one would be so insane as to think this, especially none who had read his other writings, "in which whatever of sanctity and penetration can be contained in the breast of moral philosophy is there discerned with so much majesty in the words that nothing can be expressed for men's instruction with more fulness, nothing with more beauty, nothing with more ripeness, nothing, finally, with more sanctity." And he adds, with a humility which I think was genuine: "I might in addition adduce my own bucolic poem, whose meaning I well know, but I think it is better to omit that, because I am not yet of such worth that I ought to mingle with illustrious men, and because, too, one's own productions ought to be left to the judgment of others."²

He concludes the chapter with a picturesque turn worthy of Sidney, and, as Professor Scott has pointed out, recalling one passage of the *Defense*:

¹ P. 366.

² *Ibid.*

"We must believe that it is not only illustrious men . . . who have put into their poems profound meanings, but that there is never an old woman doting on the home hearth in the watches of the winter nights, who, when she tells tales of Orcus or the Fates or of witches—about which they oftenest make up their stories—does not, as she invents and repeats them, conceal beneath the narrative some meaning, according with the measure of her narrow powers—a meaning sometimes by no means to be derided, through which she wishes either to terrify the little boys, or to divert the girls, or to make the old people laugh, or at least to show forth the power of fortune."¹

There follows a defence of the poets' love of solitude,² and then a defence of the alleged obscurity of poets' writings.³ First, as usual, he argues that if they are obscure, so too are the philosophers, and the writers of the Scriptures; and if this concealment of the truth is right in the Bible, which is meant for the multitude, it is much more allowable in poetry, which is meant for but few. Moreover, it is well to conceal precious truths, lest by too easy accessibility they become cheap, while if they are hidden, those who really seek them can always find.

In answering the charge that poets are liars, Boccaccio begins by defining a lie. A lie is an untrue statement closely resembling truth, through which the truth is repressed and the false expressed, and this for the purpose of injuring or assisting some one.⁴ Now, of the various kinds of poetry, only the epic approximates the truth of history, but this form has become sanctioned by common consent. For the rest, and as a general answer, it may be said that the poet does not deceive, he invents, and if his inventions are lies, so too are those of John in the Apocalypse.⁵ The poets did indeed write of many gods, whereas there is but one God, but these were conventional expressions. Virgil, for instance, knew well there was but one God, when he wrote: "Jupiter omnipotens,

¹ *Ibid.*³ Cap. XII.⁵ P. 370.² Cap. XI.⁴ P. 369.

precibus si flecteris ullis," etc. "Omnipotens" is not applied to any other of the gods, and they are really "considered not as gods, but as members of God, or functions of the divinity."¹ They did not of course know God as we know him, but this was not their fault. For there are two kinds of *untruth-tellers*; those who tell an untruth knowingly and advisedly, and those who tell it unwittingly. It is only the first who are properly called liars. Of those who tell an untruth in ignorance, there are again two kinds, those whose ignorance is excusable, and those whose is not. The ignorance of the heathen poets is certainly pardonable, for they had received no such revelation as had been granted to the Hebrews. Or, at least, if they are liars, so too are the philosophers, Aristotle and the rest.

As to the poets being the "apes" of the philosophers,² this is not the case. Rather, they are themselves philosophers, the essential content of their works is wholly consonant with that of philosophy, although their methods are different. The passage here is worth quoting:

"Moreover, a simple imitator in no wise deviates from the footsteps of his model, and this is by no means perceived in the case of poets. For, allowing that they do not deviate from philosophic conclusions, they do not reach them by the same path. The philosopher disproves by syllogisms what he thinks untrue, and by the same method he proves what he maintains, and this openly; whereas the poet, what he has conceived through meditation, he conceals with as much art as he can, beneath the veil of fiction,"³ etc.

"If," he goes on, "they had said they were apes of nature, it might . . . have been endured . . . since, according to his powers the poet tries to describe in lofty song whatever is done by nature herself. . . . If these fellows should choose to look, they will see the movements of the sky and of the stars, the noise and sweep of the winds, and the noisy crackling of flames, the roar of the waves, the height of mountains, the shadows of the woods, the course of the rivers, so clearly

¹ P. 370.² Cap. xvii.³ P. 376.

described that the things themselves would seem to be in the few letters of the songs. In this [sense] I will admit that poets are apes, and I think it a most honorable endeavor to strive by art after that which nature does by power.”¹

The chapter closes with a quick turn and thrust at his opponents too characteristic to leave out :

“But what further? It would be better for them [*i. e.*, the maligners of the poets] and for us with them to act, if possible, so as to be apes of Jesus Christ, rather than to scoff at the little understood work of poets.”²

In the next chapter³ he deals with the assertion that it is a deadly sin to read poetry. Its accusers, putting on an air of sanctity, cry out : “Oh ye redeemed with divine blood, if there is in you any piety . . . cast away these accursed books of poetry, burn them in the flames, and consign their ashes to the winds. Even to wish to look upon them at all is a deadly crime, they instil into your minds fatal poison, they drag you into Hell, they render you exiles from the heavenly kingdom to all eternity.”⁴

Thus, says Boccaccio, thus cry the poet-haters, calling Jerome to witness, who said that “the songs of the poets are the food of devils.”

He replies as follows:—First, admitting for the sake of argument, that the heathen poems do contain untruth and iniquity—what of that? They did not know Christ and could only speak as they knew. Neither the laws, nor the prophets nor the ordinance of the popes forbid us to read them. What follows is perhaps worth quoting, for its quaintness and its allusions to contemporary manners and contemporary art :

“Yet I confess it would be far better to study the sacred writings than these, even although these are good ; I think such students are more acceptable to God, to the Pope, and to the church. But we are not all nor always led by the same passion, and so sometimes some are drawn to poetry. And if we are, . . . where is the crime, what is the evil?

¹ *Ibid.*² *Ibid.*³ Cap. XVIII.⁴ P. 376.

We can without harm listen to the heathen customs, we can, if we like, receive the heathen themselves, show them hospitality, give them justice, if they seek it, cement friendship with them; only to read the writings of their poets, this, please God, we are by these learned men, forbidden. The accursed errors of Manichæus, Arius, and Pelagius, and the rest of the heretics—no one, as we know, forbids us to study these. But to read the poets' verses is horrifying, as these men clamor,—nay, it is a deadly sin. We may gaze at the street jugglers we may listen to the actors singing at the banquets their shameful songs and we are not for this haled to Hell. But to have read the poets, does this render us exiles from the eternal kingdom? It is right for the painter even in sacred buildings to represent the three-headed dog, watching the threshold of Dis, or Charon the boatman of Acheron ploughing the fords, the Erinyes girt with serpents and armed with inflamed countenances, Pluto himself, ruler of the woful realm, imposing torments upon the damned. Yet these same things it is wrong for the poets to write in sounding verse, and an unpardonable sin to read. The painter is permitted to portray in the halls of kings and nobles the loves of the gods of old, the crimes of men, and all sorts of such stories, and no decree of the fathers forbids it, while every one may freely gaze upon them. Yet they will have it that the inventions of poets, encrusted with literary ornament, and read mainly by the learned, corrupt men's minds more than paintings which are gazed at by the ignorant."¹

But all this is argued on the supposition that the poets are really iniquitous in their content. As an actual fact they are not so, except for the single blot of heathendom. For how is poetry an offender more than philosophy? Its essential content is the same, though its manner is different. Why then do men praise Socrates and Plato and Aristotle, and condemn Homer and Hesiod and Virgil?

As for Jerome's words, they have been misunderstood. Jerome himself is steeped in the heathen poets, and when he censured poets he meant only the bad poets. Augustine, too, knew the poets well, and quotes them, while, if yet higher

¹ P. 377.

authority is wanted, did not Paul quote from Menander and from Epimenides? Finally: "Did not our Lord and Savior himself . . . use Terence's words, in addressing the prostrate Paul: 'It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks?' Far be it from me to think that Christ the Lord borrowed the words from Terence, however long the poet lived before the words were spoken. It is enough for me that this suffices to prove my point, that our Savior was willing that some of his words and thoughts should have been spoken from the mouth of Terence, that it might be evident that the songs of the poets are by no means food of the devils."¹

Finally,² his opponents bring in as evidence the decision of Plato that poets ought to be banished from the cities. Plato's authority, he admits, is indeed great, but his words have been misunderstood. He never intended to banish the good poets—Homer, Virgil, Ennius, Petrarch—but only the bad ones, of whom there are some. For, just as all liquors have their dregs, so Philosophy has its Cynics and Epicureans, so Christianity had its Donatists and other heretics, so poetry had its low comic poets. But it is not right to condemn all for the fault of a few. The same argument is elaborated with regard to Boethius's condemnation of poetry, and finally Boccaccio concludes with an exhortation to the accusers of poetry. He bids them study it and try to understand it, and if they condemn, to condemn with discrimination. He concludes: "Since, therefore, you are convinced that poesy and the poets are not to be scorned, nor tossed aside, but cherished, enough has been said. While if you obstinately persist in your madness, one must bear with you, although you are to be scorned, for nothing could be written that would give you satisfaction."³

Such is, in brief, the argument of the treatise. But a brief résumé can give no idea of certain characteristics of the work—its diffuseness, its lack of proportion, of discriminat-

¹ Pp. 378, 379.² Cap. XIX.³ P. 384.

ing emphasis, of literary style, its curious intermingling of the superficial and the essential. In all these particulars the work bears the stamp of a second-rate mind, a mind not philosophically creative, a mind sensitive indeed, and aspiring, but without the power to think fundamentally and therefore consistently.

In considering his treatise, two questions at once occur: First, was the opposition to poetry described by Boccaccio an actual fact or a rhetorical fiction? Secondly, how far is his defense original and how far taken from others?

For the first, it is certain that Boccaccio invented nothing. The opposition was real enough, though its bitter aggressiveness had been slowly dying down as the Christian church grew more and more sure of its power. Philosophy had already been freed from the ban, and its position must have been indeed unquestioned for Boccaccio to have used it as we have seen he did, along with the Scriptures, for comparison with poetry, in his reiterated *reductio ad absurdum*: "if the poets are thus or thus, so also are the Scriptures, so also are the philosophers; if you condemn one you condemn all." But poetry was longer in gaining recognition.¹ The pagan poets were, it is true, studied in the schools all through the Middle Ages, but almost exclusively as grammatical exercises. Where here and there a man, such as Augustine, knew and cared for them in another way, it was always somewhat distrustfully, with a half guilty sense that he was yielding to his lower nature.

And if the opposition to poetry was actual, the expression of this opposition also was always such as Boccaccio has represented: it was always asserted that the poets were liars, that their writings were dangerous and subversive of religion and morality; always St. Jerome was cited, and Boethius, and Plato.²

¹ Cf. D. Comparetti, *Virgil in the Middle Ages*.

² Cf. A. Hortis, *Studi sulle Opere Latine del Boccaccio*, p. 208.

Passing, then, to his defence,—most of his argument appears to have been given before him. The whole system of allegorical interpretation, both of Biblical and of pagan writing, was fully elaborated between the fourth and the sixth centuries,¹ and Boccaccio had this part of his argument ready-made for him. The idea of allegory was a basic principle in the poetic theory of Dante and of Petrarch, while the specific argument: “If you condemn fables, you condemn the Scriptures,” had been explicitly formulated by Petrarch.² The derivation of *poesia* from the Greek *poëtes* is, too, found in Petrarch,³ and there are many more parallels—yet more, doubtless, than I have myself noticed—between Boccaccio and Dante, Boccaccio and Petrarch, and Boccaccio and the Church Fathers. To Aristotle and Plato he was, notwithstanding his familiar use of their names, very slightly indebted. He had probably read little, and that little, got at second or third hand, he had not understood, as is sufficiently evident from his misconceptions of Plato.

So much for his relations to others. The point in which, says Hortis,⁴ he was original, in which he was in advance even of Petrarch, was in his firm and consistent support of poetry as an independent art, separate from religion on the one hand, and philosophy on the other. It was not that his love for it was deeper than was others’—we may doubt whether it was as deep or as instinctive—but that it was deliberate and self-approving. He writes, indeed, as if he were in complete agreement with Augustine and Jerome, as if he were their expounder to an audience which had misunderstood them. In reality, it was he who misunderstood, who did not, or for the purposes of his argument would not see, that he and they were a world apart, that the difference between Augustine’s half guilty sympathy with art and his own placid acceptance of art on the one hand, and religion

¹ Cf. Comparetti; Voigt, *Die Wiederbelebung des Classischen Alterthums*, I, p. 30; Hortis, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

² *Epist. Rer. Fam.*, x.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Pp. 210, 211; 219.

on the other, was the difference between mediaevalism and the renaissance. There is a wide gulf between the ascetic who spoke of the "sweet vanity" of Homer's fictions, who remembered with sorrow the time when "the wooden horse lined with armed men" and "the burning of Troy" and "Creusa's shade and sad similitude" "were the choice spectacle of my vanity,"¹—between such a man and the man who could write thus complacently: "I do not therefore say that the priest or the monk or any other churchman bound to the service of God ought to make his breviary of less account than Virgil; but when he has with devotion and tears said the sacred office, it is not a sin against the Holy Spirit to look at the pure lines of a poet."²

Thus Boccaccio asserted consistently and deliberately the legitimacy of art as a part of life; doing, says Hortis, what Abelard, with all his boldness, had not dared to do,—what even Petrarch had wavered in asserting. Dante, indeed, seems to have held this position, but Boccaccio was certainly the first to give it ordered expression.

It is inevitable that we should compare this treatise with the greatest work of its kind in our own language—Sidney's *Defense of Poesy*. Such a comparison was suggested some time ago by Professor Scott,³ and a number of correspondences were noted between the two works, tending to show that Sidney had read Boccaccio. The antecedent probability that Sidney, about to write his *Defense*, should have examined all the previous treatises of the kind, does indeed seem great, and one or two of the parallels given by Professor Scott are striking. They are, I think, hardly conclusive. For, to establish a proof that a given parallelism indicates conscious or unconscious reminiscence, it is necessary to show that it could probably not have come about in any other way—unless indeed we know that one author had read the

¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, I, XIII.

² Boccaccio, *Comento*, Lez. III.

³ *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. VI, p. 97 f.

other. Now, in Sidney's case we do not know this, and from what we have seen of Boccaccio's relations to his predecessors and contemporaries, it would seem quite possible that later writers should appear to echo most of his ideas, without having read him. There is not space to consider the parallel passages singly, but in all of them there is, I think, no more reason for assuming Boccaccio as the source than for assuming Dante, or Petrarch, or Richard de Bury, or Horace, or the mediaeval tradition as embodied in the writings of the church fathers who formed a common source for both Sidney and Boccaccio; while there are several reasons against assuming Boccaccio as their source.

After all, however, what gives to Boccaccio's treatise its great interest is not its being a hypothetical source for a few of Sidney's phrases—a spiritual influence it could never have been, even if Sidney had read and reread the volume from his boyhood on, because, in Amiel's phrase, "only like can be affected by like," and Boccaccio and Sidney had spiritually almost nothing in common. Boccaccio's interest for us lies rather in the fact that he comes at a very early point in modern poetic theory—that he is near enough to the Middle Ages to share in their conception of the symbolic nature of art, yet far enough out of them to be free from their narrow view of the relation between art and morality; not modern enough and variously sympathetic enough to have entered into the fulness of Greek thought, yet conscious that it offered great and new things. As we have seen, he held to the mediaeval theory of allegorical symbolism, and he had just a glimpse of the Greek notion of nature-imitation, but there was no attempt to fuse the two—Boccaccio's was not the mind to make such a fusion. Such a mind, however, Sidney's was, and his poetic philosophy, grounded in a knowledge of Greek thought which if not complete was sympathetic, is an Aristotelian modification of Plato and a poet's rendering of Aristotle; his *Defense* is one of the last of a series which begins with Plato.

It is as a member of this series that Boccaccio's treatise is of surpassing interest: as one in the series which includes Plato and Aristotle, Cicero and Horace, Lucretius and Quintilian and Longinus, Vida and Scaliger and Boileau and Lessing, Sidney and Milton and Burke and Shelley. And if his is a lesser name, his utterances are none the less worthy of note, as those of a sincere if not a thorough thinker, of one who spoke the thought of an age in many ways germinal, an age without which Sidney's rare nature could not have found the expression it did find.

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